DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 413 CE 052 379

AUTHOR	Johnson, John
TITLE	The Way Through. (A Personal Journey through the Maze of Literacy).
INSTITUTION	Cambridge House Literacy Scheme, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-9508988-4-8
PUB DATE	87
NOTE	75p.; Subtitle on inside cover page reads "Personal Learning Experiences of an Adult Literacy Student."
AVAILABLE FROM	Cambridge House Literacy Scheme, 131 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0HF, England (1.50 pounds).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120) -- Books (010)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Educational Improvement; Educational Policy; *Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; *Personal Narratives; *Program Development; Reading Instruction; *Tutoring; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS	England (London)

ABSTRACT

This book is a personal history of adult literacy as seen through the eyes of a student. The document assesses and evaluates styles of teaching and the student's role through the years 1969-1986 in England. The focus is on developing a new approach to literacy work, based on the principle of student-centered learning. In this method, the adult collaborates with the tutor in identifying the most effective subject matter, methods, and learning style. Other topics discussed include students' involvement in literacy program activities, conferences, and workshops as well as the experience of different methods: one-to-one tutoring, group work, and independent learning. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED306413

THE WAY THROUGH

("A Personal Journey through the maze of literacy")

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG023379

THE WAY THROUGH:

Personal Learning Experiences of an Adult Literacy Student

by
John Johnson

THE WAY THROUGH

Cover Design by Richard Lake
Typesetting by Pat Angove
Photographs by the students
at Cambridge House Literacy Scheme
Printed by Speedprint

Copyright: Cambridge House Literacy Scheme

ISBN No. : 0 9508988:4:8

Cambridge House Literacy Scheme
131 Camberwell Road
London SE5 OHF

701 4221

THE WAY THROUGH

CONTENTS

Chapter One	-	How I Got Going
Chapter Two	-	My Time at the Institutes
Chapter Three	-	My Return to Cambridge House
Chapter Four	-	My Final Try
Chapter Five	-	Working with a 1-to-1
Chapter Six	-	Becoming Involved
Chapter Seven	-	Weekend Conferences
Chapter Eight	-	NSA/NFVLS Conferences
Chapter Nine	-	Where Do I Go From Here
Chapter Ten	-	Cambridge House Now
Chapter Eleven	-	Breaking into New Ground

FOREWORD

It was in 1964 that people in Cambridge House in South London first realised that there were adults who needed help in learning to read and write and set up an adult literacy scheme to do something about it. 21 years later we now know that there are far more people looking for help than was ever imagined. In the 1970s voluntary organisations mounted a major campaign to tell people about the need for tuition. This brought about a TV series - 'On the Move' - and led to the setting up of a government agency to help deal with the problem.

When teaching first began, the only model available to work from was the teaching of reading to young children. Once adult literacy tutors had gained confidence and experience they largely put aside these methods and developed other new ways of working which were more suited to the needs and knowledge of adult learners. At the heart of these new methods is the principle of student-centred learning, which focusses on the adult's right and ability to identify, in collaboration with a tutor, the subject matter, methods and styles of learning which will be most effective in his or her individual case.

A great deal of progress has been made over this period and I have been just one of many people working in the field who have thought that it was time that someone wrote about all the developments. While we were still wondering who would do it, and how, John Johnson has produced "The Way Through." No book could more clearly illustrate the changes that have taken place.

John first decided to go along to a literacy scheme in 1969. During the next ten years he tried a variety of

different centres and their different forms of provision.

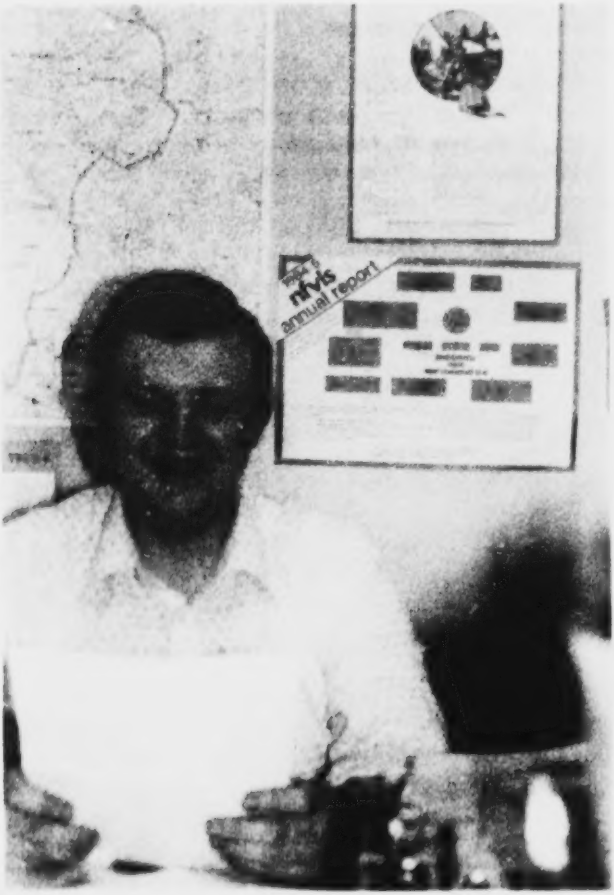
He was disillusioned with much of what he found. Eventually he came to Cambridge House and found changes which meant that, although he still had difficulties, he was now able as a student to talk about those difficulties in the knowledge that the scheme would do its best to meet his particular needs.

In writing about his personal experiences John provides lessons for people involved in all forms of adult education through his ability to look critically not just at the provision that is offered but also at his own role within it as a student.

During the last four years John has also taken part in events organised by the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes (NFVLS). One of the aims of the NFVLS during this period has been to help develop ways in which students can be effectively involved in decision-making in their schemes. It will be clear from the pages of this book that John gained from and contributed to these events in equal (and large) measure. What he gained was the readily-used opportunity to listen to people from other schemes and the confidence to make use of what he heard. What he has contributed has been his own vigorous and stimulating approach to the discussion of how adult literacy schemes can and should be run.

That approach, critical yet constructive, has now been employed to produce "The Way Through." It is a book that the adult literacy world has needed for sometime. I am glad that it now has it.

Eric Appleby
National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes (NFVLS)



John Johnson

Chapter One

HOW I GOT GOING

I had left school, after having a lot of problems with my lessons, because I had missed a lot due to a lot of illness. 1969 was still the time when you were looked down upon if you couldn't read and so you tried to hide it and not let anyone know. I had to hide my problems at work and keep making excuses, but I realised that I couldn't do that forever. I managed at work because I worked with my hands in a factory and I didn't have to do a lot of paperwork, although I did change jobs a few times. I did have some trouble reading road signs and finding my way around, but I managed to get around this as long as I stayed in the area that I knew.

I then got married and I settled into a permanent engineering job.

I realised that I needed help, but I didn't know where to go to ask for it. There was not much help around anyway, as illiteracy was looked upon as the not so important side of education. It was supposed that you had just been lazy at school and so that it was all your own fault, so why should you be given help now! It wasn't then admitted that there are many reasons for illiteracy. At this time I saw a TV programme about illiteracy. I can't remember much about the programme now, but at the end of the programme they gave an address that you could write to if you needed help. Through this I got in contact with Cambridge House and from this it all began.

The first step was that I went along for an interview, to give me the background of the Scheme and how it worked. It was an enormous step just to admit to someone else that I had problems. Then came, what was for me, a very nerve-racking experience. The lady asked me to read aloud a passage from a school book. I found the first book too difficult, so we tried an easier book, which I did manage to struggle through, with a lot of effort. Fortunately she then said that the Scheme could help me and that she would get in touch with me again as soon as they had found me a tutor. A couple of weeks later she made arrangements for me to meet the lady who was going to be my tutor.

I met Rosalind, my tutor, at Cambridge House. The first time that we met it was very harrowing as it was a new experience for us both. It was Rosalind's first time as a tutor and I was her first pupil! We soon settled down into a pattern of working though, meeting once a week and with her giving me a passage to practice inbetween. Unfortunately, in those days there was no material to work from, so Rosalind had to devise our own material. There was very little back-up for tutors or pupils, so we were left mainly to our own devices. I remember that about every three months we used to have a reading test, to assess my progress. After a few of these tests I soon deciphered the coding which gave you your reading age and I realised that sometimes I went up and sometimes I went down. I personally never found these tests to be of much help. After all they were devised for children and not for adults! In fact they proved to be more of a hindrance than a help to me and Rosalind decided to give them up.

My first entrance to Cambridge House

We used to meet mainly in Talbot Settlement, which was a ladies' settlement, just around the corner from Cambridge House. Two or three other pupils and

tutors also used to meet there, but because of the layout of the building and the different times that everyone met, I never got to meet any of the other students. The lady in charge of adult literacy at Cambridge House arranged for Rosalind and I to meet another tutor and pupil, to let us all swop ideas and experiences. It was a very good idea in theory, but they worked in a completely different way to us and had completely different ideas, besides working at a completely different level. It was still a worthwhile experience though it made me realise that I wasn't alone with illiteracy problems and also that I wasn't the only one having lessons.

After eighteen months Rosalind got married and she moved to Blackheath. I kept meeting her for about six months, but owing to the extra travelling and also that my wife had had a baby, it became more difficult for us to meet, plus the added fact that, after two years, we had got into a rut. Although Rosalind was an excellent tutor and that I learned a lot from her, for which I will always be grateful, we had reached the limit of the help that she could give me, as no matter how good a tutor, after a time you run out of ideas, especially when you are working without any outside help. Considering that we were working completely alone I managed to get on quite well. I did not carry on with another tutor and it was, in fact, about another two years, before I picked up again where Rosalind and I had left off.

Holborn Reading Scale

1. The dog got wet and Tom had to rub him dry. 509

2. He was a very good boy to give you some of his sweets. 600

3. My sister likes me to open my book and read to her. 603

4. Go away and hide behind that door where we found you just now. 606

5. Please don't let anyone spoil these nice fresh flowers. 609

6. The string had eight knots in it which I had to untie. 700

7. Wine is made from the juice of grapes which grow in warm countries. 703

8. Mary went to the grocer's and bought some sugar and some syrup. 706

9. Quench your thirst by drinking a glass of our sparkling ginger ale. 709

10. The people could scarcely obtain enough food to remain healthy. 800

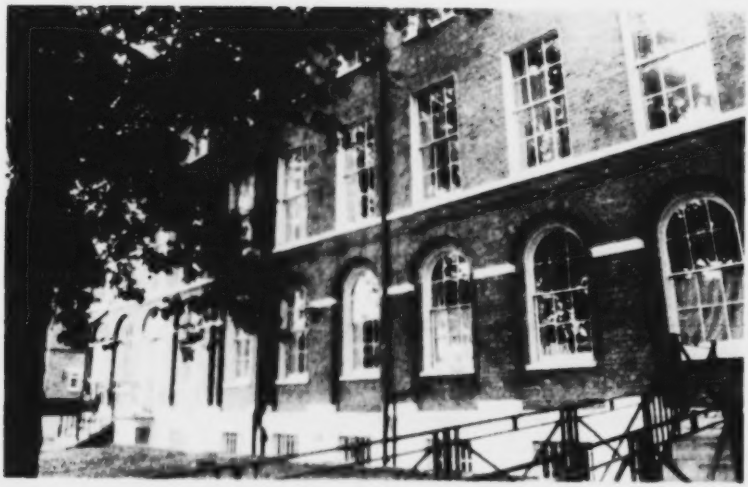
Chapter Two

MY TIME AT THE INSTITUTES

Two years later, in 1973, I felt that I was ready to try again. I hadn't heard from Cambridge House in the previous couple of years and I didn't expect that they would have improved their facilities in the intervening time so I didn't consider going back to Cambridge House, but looked around to see what other classes were available. I was already attending evening classes for carpentry and I noticed in the prospectus that there were illiteracy classes at the local Adult Education Institute, so that is where I re-started.

This class was not very successful, unfortunately, for the following reasons: apart from other illiteracy students there were also foreign students there, doing "English as a Second Language." Half the lessons, therefore, were spent explaining what words mean and the foreign students could not understand why the rest of us couldn't master our own native tongue. There was also here still the same problem, as before at Cambridge House, of a total lack of material to work from. It was also obvious that the tutor had had no training in the special way of teaching illiteracy students. Being fair to the tutor, though, illiteracy and English as a Second Language are really two completely different subjects. After all, you wouldn't find French and German being taught in the same class! I managed to stick it out there for about nine months, but after this I realised that I wasn't learning anything and, in fact, that I was actually slipping back. I was totally lacking in any confidence. At least, when I started, I had felt that I could learn, but by then I had serious doubts about whether I would ever be able

to do so.



Cambridge House from Camberwell Road

The following September I thought I would try a second institute. I enquired, before enrolling, whether it was just for illiteracy and English students, as I couldn't bear a repeat of my previous experiences! I was assured that I would be alright and so I enrolled. Unfortunately again, this class didn't turn out to be too successful either. Although the tutor tried his best, this class had its problems as well. Although I am in favour of mixed ability classes, it can be stretched too far! Although this was classed as an illiteracy class, some of the students there were not what I would call illiteracy students, but were just

there to brush up on their grammar and spelling and could read perfectly. At the other end of the scale there were other students there who were sub-normal and who obviously needed their own special help. I suppose that less than half the class were really illiteracy students. I managed to stay there for two terms, but that was enough!

I didn't fancy trying yet another institute and getting the same results once again. I felt even more dejected now. It was one of the worst decisions that I had ever made, deciding to try the institutes. Apart from losing all my confidence, it left a deep-rooted inability in me, for me to cope in a group, which still persists today, although not to such a degree and I manage to control it now. It might sound an exaggeration, but I felt that I had failed, at school (in groups), at the first institute and now, yet again, at the second adult class. This all seemed to reaffirm for me my inability to work in a group at all and I ended up withdrawing into a shell within myself. I have seen it in other students, how it affects one's life generally!

Illiteracy is full of its ups and downs. It is easy to carry on when you are up, but it is almost impossible to do so when you are down! Illiteracy has its practical problems, but it also has its psychological problems. The only real assets that any illiteracy student needs is a strong confidence in his own ability to learn. I am afraid that my personal experience of institutes completely smashed my own faith of my own learning ability and I had very serious doubts about whether I would ever try classes anywhere again and that I would, therefore, have this problem for the rest of my life.

Chapter Three

MY RETURN TO CAMBRIDGE HOUSE

It was a further two years before I picked up once again where I had left off. My daughter had just started school and I thought that it would be a good time for me to go back again. I didn't fancy the idea of her quickly getting ahead of me and my not being able to help her. The problem therefore arose of where to go this time! I felt that this time it really would be my last try and I really had to persevere, because, if I packed it in yet again, I would never try again. I certainly didn't fancy going back to the institutes but it was possible that they may have improved in the intervening two years. I decided, therefore, that as I knew Cambridge House, to go along there again, just to make enquiries of whether their literacy help was still available. If it was, then with a bit of luck, I might be able to get another tutor again. I found out that literacy help was still available there, so I made an appointment to have another interview, which I went along to about a week later.

When I arrived at Cambridge House, for the interview, I found that there had been some major changes made. The original scheme was no longer in operation and a new scheme had started and Cambridge House was now a literacy scheme in its own right and classes were actually being held in Cambridge House itself. It was lucky for me that there was a vacancy in the Tuesday evening group and I started back there again in September 1976.

This group was smaller than the group that I had been in at the institute which gave the tutor a much better opportunity to help everyone individually. This group was also a mixed-ability group, but within practical levels and everyone there was a literacy student and the tutor seemed to know what she was doing. The fact that it wasn't held in a classroom, with a blackboard, made a big difference straightaway. The fact that it was called a group and not a class, showed immediately the difference in attitude between Cambridge House and the institutes. There was, at last, a lot more material to work from and a few students' writings were just starting to filter through. Basically it was a sound group.

Things went fairly well for about the first six months, but after this my initial enthusiasm started wearing off and the going started getting harder. Unfortunately my feelings of my ability to cope within a group started to appear again and I became more and more unable to cope with the 'downs.' My progress became slower and slower and then non-existent.

After I had been in the group for about nine months, I found out that there were a few individual tutors available, as a student had left the group and gone to work with a volunteer tutor. I had renewed hope that help should now be available for me after all. I asked, on numerous occasions, whether it could be possible for me to have a tutor, but I always got the same brush-off that "no decision had been made." In those days it was impossible for students to see the staff, or those people who made the decisions.

It went on like this for about six months and my problems with the group were getting worse, although I was trying to overcome these problems. What made

the situation worse for me, was that the other student had started in the group after me and he had asked for a tutor after I had done. When I asked the tutor about this, all that she would say was, that as he was younger than me, the staff had felt that an individual tutor would be of more benefit for him than for me. Obviously, I felt that this was terribly unfair of them. The tutor must have realised that I was struggling within the group, but all that she would say was that it hadn't been her decision. This totally shattered me.

I carried on in the group for a short while after this, but I did start to shrink back into my shell again and it only reinforced my group fears once again. At least at the institutes one could blame the groups for being useless, but, at Cambridge House, the group was fairly satisfactory, which made my personal failure even worse. I realised again that I would never be able to read or write and I gave up all hope of my ever being able to do so. Perhaps, at 32 years, I was too old to learn! I left Cambridge House once again and accepted the fact that it really was the end of my trying. The only regret that I have about this time is that I didn't go over the tutor's head and write to whoever made the decisions. Little did I know, at the time, what changes were coming up at Cambridge House and how they could affect me. I should have persevered at Cambridge House and seen them through.

Chapter Four

MY FINAL TRY

It was in early '81 that my circumstances were changing. There was to be a bonus structure brought in at work, but which would also mean an increase in paperwork for me. It therefore became essential for me to try to get to grips properly with my problem. Nobody at work had guessed my problem, and they still haven't. I carried around a list of the most common words that I had to write on my job cards and went into a quiet corner to write them out or took them home for my wife to help me with them.

My wife and her family, unlike my own family, are always surrounded by books and living near a library is very important to them all. In fact my wife now works in a bookshop! When we first got married this didn't worry me too much, but later, when I started thinking about having lessons, I could have been intimidated by this if they hadn't been so supportive.

An important opportunity also arose for me to tell my daughter about my problem, as she was talking about her school friends and that some were better readers than others. Obviously this was very difficult for me to do, but she accepted it, although she had begun to wonder about me. I was worried though in case she blurted it out to her friends. It was a lot easier for me now to go out to classes in the evenings, without having to keep making excuses anymore about where I kept going off to! I also had the added incentive that my daughter was by now a much better reader than I and I am relieved that she takes after my wife in this respect. I now started to look around once again to

see what help was now available. I looked at the local institutes' prospectuses and literacy and English as a Second Language were now two completely separate classes.

The office at Cambridge House

My wife suggested that I contact Cambridge House once more, as I hadn't really got on too badly there before. My wife phoned up Cambridge House for me, explaining my circumstances and they made a date for me to go along for another interview. When I went for the interview I met Rosey, who was one of the paid workers. Little did I then realise what an important meeting this was to be and what a major

part Rosey was to have in really helping me to overcome all my difficulties at last. At the interview we talked about all the various help that I had had in literacy in the past and how best Cambridge House could help me this time. I felt quite nervous at the start of the interview, but by the end of it it felt more like a friendly chat. I was half expecting Rosey to turn me down, partly because I lived outside the catchment area that they now had, but also because I had had two lots of help from them already and had left again both times. Rosey said though that they would be pleased to help me again, which was a great relief.

I was given the choice of working with a group or with a volunteer in a 1-to-1, but that I might have to wait a while until a volunteer became available. I said that even after all my problems I was quite willing to start back in a group, as I was quite eager to get started again. My original idea was to start in a group and, once I had got my 1-to-1, was to pack the group in. I hadn't managed to learn anything from groups before and I couldn't see why this time should be any different. Fortunately circumstances and events made it difficult for me to do this and luckily another mistake on my part was therefore avoided!

I started in the Thursday evening group about a week later and by sheer luck a tutor became available quite soon and so within a month of my interview I had started in a group and I also had a 1-to-1. This proved in the years ahead, to be a most useful and practical combination. I wasn't at Cambridge House long before I realised that some massive changes had taken place in the Scheme. Not only was there much more materials available and more student writings, but a whole new concept - student participation, student

involvement, student-centred learning, students having control of their own learning. Obviously at the time I had no idea what any of this meant or how it was all useful to students. Any idea of students having a say in what or how they learnt was totally strange to me. Students were students and teachers taught! I was pleased to say that as the months went on I learnt the value of taking control of my own learning. This has been a major part of my being able to overcome most of my difficulties at last. It was very fortunate for me that I returned to Cambridge House when I did. I was extremely lucky in three ways:-

1. Cambridge House now has a very progressive scheme, where students are encouraged to grow and develop.

2. That I started in a group and a 1-to-1 virtually at the same time.

3. The Scheme itself was preparing for further changes.

Since I have been back many positive changes have occurred in the Scheme and this is an on-going process. Students are in close contact with the full-time staff. Without a doubt this is one of the greatest assets of being in a voluntary scheme. I think it would be extremely difficult to do within the confines of an institute.

Chapter Five

WORKING WITH A 1-to-1

After my second week in the group Rosey introduced me to Ian, who was going to be my 1-to-1 tutor. As Ian had already worked with another student, he had some insight of what the problems were and he had also attended the training sessions for volunteer tutors at Cambridge House. It took me a lot longer this time though, to settle down and to get into a working pattern with Ian, than I had expected it to do. It was not because Ian was a bad tutor, but mainly because I again totally lacked any confidence in myself and possibly my motivation at restarting again was wrong.

It took me about three months to settle down to working with Ian. When I had worked with Rosalind in the past it was more a teacher-pupil relationship, which worked well enough at the time, plus the fact that it was then the accepted way of working at that time. With Ian though it started off that way, but as the months went by I found that I was learning new ways of working with a tutor. Ian was gradually encouraging me to take more responsibility for my own learning. You could say that it was the start of my beginning to understand what student participation is!

After we had been meeting for about six months I was just about up to the same level of reading and writing that I had been when I had left Rosalind way back in 1970. Unfortunately although I had spent time at institutes and back at Cambridge House, I had not progressed - in fact I had slipped back! I think that one of the most important things that I learnt from

Ian was the skill of working with a 1-to-1. This is a fact that I have only recently realised, while writing this book and reflecting back on what I have achieved.

We got down eventually into a really positive working relationship. My reading was progressing and I was making headway with spelling and, most importantly, I had built up confidence again with myself at last in my ability to learn. Then disaster struck and my guardian angel deserted me! Ian had a new job, which meant shiftwork, and so it was impossible for him to carry on at Cambridge House as a volunteer tutor. This set me into a state of panic.

Although for me a 1-to-1 seems to be the best way for me to learn, its greatest drawback is one's dependence on the tutor, which makes the student very vulnerable. Unfortunately at the same time I was again also having a lot of difficulties with the group I was in. I shall say more about this in the next chapter.

Another thing that made matters even worse, was that I knew that at that time, there was a shortage of volunteers in the Scheme and so I expected that it would be a while before I was able to have another 1-to-1.

With Ian leaving my confidence was totally shattered once more. Another time of decision had come! I could either pack it in yet again or go and see Rosey about the way that I felt. For about two or three weeks I put off having to make a decision. Through desperation, rather than going up to Rosey direct, I sent her a note, although she has always been very approachable. Within a few days she had asked me to see her. I felt more nervous about this meeting than about my initial one with her. The most important

thing about this meeting was that it was the first time that someone had really listened to me and it was also the first time that I had been really honest about my learning difficulties, even to myself! I was quite surprised by Rosey's understanding and appreciation of my problem. The outcome was that as soon as a suitable tutor became available again, I would get one. I also started in a different group, to see if that would be of much benefit for me. Without a doubt this meeting with Rosey was another major turning point for me and I have turned from a five-time loser, to sixth time lucky!

When I returned after the Xmas break, luck struck again! A tutor became available, because the student that she had been working with had left the Scheme and Rosey asked me whether I would like to work with her. In January '82 I met Alison, who was to be my next volunteer tutor and I was to work with Alison for just over two years. I settled down quite quickly and my progress was slow, but it was steady. This was happily another very productive time for me.

During my time with Alison I learnt further different ways of working and I developed in four ways:-

1. I definitely mastered the skills of working with volunteers. Skills might seem a strange word to use, but I had worked with three volunteers, in three different ways, and each way had been successful. It was not because the tutors had dominated me, but because I had always worked as a partner with them and every partnership has its own character.

2. I actually believed myself that I was making progress and not just that I was told I was progressing, which is a major difference and I had also started keeping my own records, instead of throwing them out.

3. I had started learning with Ian, and carried on with Alison, language experience or putting your thoughts down on paper. This was a skill that I learnt since I had been back at Cambridge House, which I started in the group and reinforced with my 1-to-1.

4. The most important thing of all that I learnt from Alison apart from responsibility for my own learning, was the combining my group work with the work that I do with my volunteer.

For those who work in a 1-to-1 situation, one of the greatest problems is thinking up new ideas and things to do. Unfortunately many 1-to-1's dry up because of this. Because we worked as a team this situation didn't develop between us because either Alison or myself would come up with further ideas or I would tell her about any difficulties that I was having in the group and we would go over them. We were both very flexible and so, in the two years that I worked with Alison, we never once ran out of ideas. I think that this is a major achievement in itself. This doesn't mean though, that things went right all of the time. Like all literacy work, there are always times when you make progress, times when you stand still and times when you feel that you are slipping back. If you have confidence you can overcome.

Obviously it was a very sad day for me when Alison also changed jobs and so also had to leave Cambridge

House. Unlike when Ian had left though, I was able to tell Rosey about it and to see whether it was possible for me to get another volunteer tutor. Luckily Alison was able to carry on until I had got my new tutor and so I was able to carry straight on from one tutor to the next.

Choosing a book to work with my 1-to-1

In March '84 I therefore met Wendy, who is my third tutor at this present time. Unlike Ian and Alison, Wendy hasn't worked with a student before, so like Rosalind in the past, it is a new experience for her. This hasn't proved a handicap though and we are working well together, as I hope that we shall for quite a while.

One of the greatest benefits I have found of working with a 1-to-1 on an individual basis, is that you can work on your own particular problems and difficulties, at your own pace and, if you cannot master something the first time, then you can go over it again and again until you do. Although I have made excellent progress and I have also been lucky with my tutors and have been able to work well with them, you cannot learn everything from a tutor. Although I have struggled in groups I do however feel that they have been an essential part of my learning, because you learn different skills in groups to those you learn with a 1-to-1. Groups and 1-to-1s complement each other very well.

There is much talk in literacy schemes of the way that students and volunteers work together. For me the most important thing is to work in the way that most suits the two of us and it has always been successful. There is basically no right or wrong way to work. If volunteers receive adequate training and the student is prepared to put something into the partnership, they should be able to find their own correct way of working together. It is important therefore that students are involved with the training of volunteer tutors, which I am pleased to say is done at Cambridge House.

The letter John sent to Rosey

To Rosemary.

I am just writing to let you know that I will be meeting Ian for the last time on tuesday 15th December I understand that there is a waiting list of 1 to 1, I am therefore letting you know that I wish to be added to the waiting list I am not asking for preferential treatment but I have made such good progress with Ians help over the last five months, that I do not wish to loose my momentum. Already, with the uncertainty of not knowing whether I will be getting another tutor all the confidence and enthusiasm that I had, is beginning to fade, and I cannot afford to fail once again I hope to hear from you soon, so that I know exactly what the position is

Yours Truly

John Johnson

Chapter Six

BECOMING INVOLVED

I had been back at Cambridge House for a couple of months before I started getting involved in the Scheme. Obviously I had noticed the great changes within the Scheme since I had been there before and I wondered how these changes had come about. The main changes were:-

1. an increased level in the numbers of staff and the staff were now an integral part of the Scheme, which they hadn't been before;

2. a positive change in the attitudes and objectives of the Scheme;

3. the students now had a greater say in the running of the Scheme.

Another important change was that the Scheme now had regular monthly meetings of the Management Group. The Management Group consists of a member of staff, who take it in turns to attend, some volunteer tutors and students. The Management Group is not an elected committee and it is open to any and all users of the Scheme. The members of the Management Group take it in turns to be the chairperson at the meeting and to work out the agenda and take the minutes.

We decided that we would have an open meeting, to try and get more feedback from the Scheme because, like most schemes, only a small percentage of users attended the meetings regularly and we felt that it was important to try and get more people involved.

This meeting was very successful and one of the points that came up was that the term "management group" put some people off so we decided that we would call it a "scheme meeting" instead and that has helped and we do now have more people attending meetings.

The Management Group discusses a wide range of topics, obviously far too numerous to go into great detail here, but some of the topics that have been discussed are - the training of volunteer tutors, the subjects of short courses and what type of workshops to hold, fund-raising and publicity and visits to other schemes.

An occasion, which I think shows how seriously the Scheme now takes student involvement, was when two members of the staff left in 1983 and so the Scheme had to find two new full-time staff to replace them. Obviously there was much discussion about it in the Management Group, as it was still called, of what kind of qualities the new people should have. The Scheme advertised the posts and then chose about ten applicants to come for interview. I was chosen to be one of the student representatives from the Scheme on the interview panel, together with Peter Lawless another student, Fran Walker a volunteer tutor, Rosey Eggar a staff member, Colin Rochester the Head of Cambridge House and Gay Lobley the Head of Literacy at ILEA. I think that it is really saying something good for the Scheme that two of the six panel members were students! I had been for interviews myself for jobs, but I would never have guessed that one day I would have been on the other side of the table!

Obviously I found it a very nerve-racking, but very interesting experience. I remember the day very well, it was a hot and long day, but by the end of the interviews we had managed to find two people. I am

pleased to say that Alison and Vera have fitted in with us very well and they are still working with us at the moment. When they had been with us for a while, I asked them how they felt being interviewed by two students and they both felt it was a good idea. After all it was the students that they would be working for and with and who was better qualified to know what type of staff they wanted!

I have also attended four training courses for new volunteer tutors, as the Scheme now feels that it is important for students to be included in the training courses. Much to my surprise I have found these courses very useful and they have given me a far greater understanding of what it means to be a volunteer tutor and this has been a major factor of why I now work so well with volunteers in a 1-to-1.

Students meeting at Cambridge House

An important area that I have become involved with, is going away on Training Conferences, run by the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes (NFVLS). I would never have attended any of these conferences, if I hadn't been involved with the Management Group, as I would never have had the confidence or reason. I will mention more about the conferences in the next chapter. I have also been involved in planning the subject matter for "writing weekends."

In one of the group discussions we spoke about dyslexia and someone mentioned that Susan Hampshire had written a book about her own personal problems with dyslexia and how she had overcome it - "Susan's Story." I volunteered to write to her and ask her if she would visit the Scheme and give us a talk, which she very kindly did. There are just two or three students at Cambridge House whose literacy problems stem from dyslexia, but we all found her talk very interesting and helpful.

We all thought that these visits from various people added spice to the ordinary routine of 1-to-1 and group work and gave us all something special to look forward to, especially as some of these visitors did not have problems with literacy, but let us into the joy of their field of literacy. One of our local policemen was writing a book about his life in the force and came to give us a talk on how he sat down every day and actually set about writing. We were especially interested when we found out, that included in one chapter, was the time, a few years before, when he had had to visit Cambridge House, late at night, after a suspected burglary!

Kenneth Williams also very kindly visited the Scheme. He told us about his radio programme, at the time "Just a Minute," but we were especially interested in the fact that he is a great believer in writing a daily diary and how he felt that that might help us.

About that time there was much discussion about the Scheme's newsletter, which was produced by the staff. We decided as an experiment that the newsletter should be produced instead by the groups within the Scheme, who would each take it in turns to produce it. This idea proved very successful, because it gave an opportunity to all students to put something into the newsletter and for most of the students it was the first time that any of them had had anything printed.

We decided to change the name of the newsletter, which at the time was called "Groundsheet" and we held a competition to find which was the most popular name from a list. It was while we were deciding this that the Scheme had the visit from Kenneth Williams. As he was one of the stars of the very popular series of "Carry On" films, this gave us the idea to call the newsletter "Carry on Writing."

In the time that I have been in the Scheme, I have been involved in all the different aspects of the Scheme at different times. Possibly this is one of the most important points about Cambridge House now, that students and volunteers can all get involved in as much or as little as they wish. Comparing all this with the old days, not so long ago, when we had no choice at all, we now have ample choices. Many of the students do take advantage of this, some as much as myself, others not so much.

All this is only a sample of the Scheme's activities, there are numerous others. For example, for the interest of the students, the Scheme ran a photography course, run by a professional photographer, and we were taught how to use a camera correctly and how to develop and print black and white films. Since this course I have become more interested in photography and I have passed on my knowledge and I have actually taught other students myself and I have also run a photography workshop!

I think that the greatest benefits of being involved with the Scheme are:-

1. it is the best way to know what is going on in the Scheme;

2. you can get to know the staff better;

3. there is a greater contact with volunteers;

4. you can meet students from other groups.

The staff also find that they have benefitted from feedback from the students and volunteers and what they wish and need. All this helps to explain why Cambridge House is growing and improving.

Without a doubt the most important thing that I have learnt through being involved with the Scheme is a greater understanding of my own and other students' literacy problems and all the various ways the volunteers and staff try to help us. I have found that literacy is a lot more than just reading and writing!

A Personal look at Progress

I was very interested in your article last issue "Making Progress." They were six really good points. It made me think about whether I had made any progress in the two years that I have been at Cambridge House. So how do I measure my progress personally?

The very last thing I would do to check my progress would be to take a spelling or reading test. I have tried these in the past and I have spoken to other students about them. They find that the tests might be fine in school, but that they have no real use in adult literacy. So how do I check my progress? It is only just recently that I have realised the importance of keeping records. Unfortunately records only show what types of work you was doing and it is very hard to show how difficult you found it. Let me give you an example. I remember that when I first started in our group we took it in turns to read out aloud. I used to get really nervous, trip over even simple words and miss words out and invent words that were not there. It would be very difficult to keep a written record of this. Now however, I can read as well aloud as I can to myself.

This is due to greater confidence in myself. Where records do come in useful is where you get to a stage when you can start putting your thoughts down on your

paper and having a go at the spellings. I have just recently reached this stage myself and I can start looking at my spelling mistakes and hopefully in the future I will be able to look back and compare my work with how it was then.

I remember only being in the group about a couple of months, when we did some dictation. Having very little confidence in myself at that time I totally froze at the prospect. Now however I can have a go. I might have extra letters in or leave other letters out, but I have the confidence to try the words. This is where you keep the mental record of your ability. Without a doubt the greatest progress that I have made so far is to get my thoughts down on paper. This was totally impossible before. I always used to come out with the same excuses. I didn't know what to say or that I was not really interested. I have also been very fortunate at Cambridge House where I have had really good volunteer tutors to work with, so that I could work on my own problems at my own pace, plus the benefit of working within a really positive group.

I have also got quite involved in our Management Group where students participation is really used to its fullest degree. This has been a great confidence booster. If I had not been involved with the Management Group, I would certainly not have had the courage to go on the weekend away to the "Literacy

in the Community" conference at Loughborough, last February. It is through these weekends that my confidence has been built up a great deal. Through meeting staff and students from other schemes throughout the country. It has given me a far greater understanding of what literacy is really about. It is not just reading and writing, but goes far deeper than that. The most important thing is to acknowledge to yourself that you have made progress, not just to be told it by other people. In fact, after a year I thought that I hadn't made much progress inspite of the fact that other people were telling me that I had made good progress. It took me nearly eighteen months to realise that I had made progress, as progress is measured in months not weeks.

I feel now that confidence and progress go hand-in-hand with each other, It is the old question of which came first the chicken or the egg! You need confidence to make progress, but you also need to make progress to build up your confidence.

John Johnson

Letter printed in NFVLS - "Wallpaper" No. 7.

Chapter Seven

WEEKEND CONFERENCES

I had been attending my Scheme for a number of months and I had gradually become more and more involved with it and it was at one of the Scheme Meetings that I first heard about conferences. There are conferences which are run by the National Federation of Voluntary Literacy Schemes (NFVLS), which is an organisation that a lot of the voluntary literacy schemes belong to, and Cambridge House happens to be one of these members. It was suggested that I might like to attend one of these weekend conferences. I must admit that at the time I wasn't very eager. However, after Rosey had explained to me what does go on at these conferences, I decided to give it a go. There were to be three people from Cambridge House attending this conference - one member of staff and another student besides myself. I wouldn't therefore be completely amongst strangers, which made it a lot easier.

During this weekend I completely changed my outlook about adult literacy. At my Scheme students, volunteers and members of staff all take it in turns to attend conferences but I have been fortunate enough to attend five of them. Each conference is on a different theme and I have learnt something new each time. I will now give you a list of some of the NFVLS conferences that I have attended.

1. Literacy in the Community - Links with Other Community Groups. Loughborough, 1982

2. Getting it Straight - Developing Links with Local Authorities, Funding Agencies, etc. Sussex, 1982

3. Students in Schemes - Developing Student Involvement. Stoke-on-Trent, 1983

4. Staying Ahead - Policy, Practice and Funding in Voluntary Schemes. Rugby, 1983

5. Training in Voluntary Schemes. Ruskin College, Oxford, 1984

The thing that surprised me about the conferences are the different ways that literacy is taught and the variations in the ways that Schemes are run. I have always found that a very important part of any conference to be the exchanges of views and ideas amongst everyone. I have found it most interesting to talk to members of staff, volunteers and students from other Schemes.

Obviously I am a great believer in student participation and student-centred learning. All of the conferences that I have attended have reinforced the view that students have a really vital role and active students can be a very great asset within a Scheme. How active students can be in a Scheme depends completely on the attitude of the members of staff - whether they are for or against student involvement. I am fortunate that at my Scheme it is vigorously encouraged, but in some Schemes the opposite is true. I think that this is a very sad mistake on the part of the staff. During the conferences there are usually three or four workshops, geared to the theme of that particular conference. I have always found all of these workshops to be very useful. It is very difficult to put into words how these workshops

function, but I will be describing a typical workshop in the next chapter.

I think that there are three main things that I have got out of attending conferences:-

1. An opportunity to look at the ways that I learn and my whole attitude to literacy. I no longer feel isolated and I have the confidence now to carry on even when I find things getting difficult. I have learnt ways of passing on my own experiences and knowledge to other students.

2. I have opportunities to exchange views with members of staff from other Schemes. A point that has emerged is the importance of teamwork between students, volunteers and members of staff. Unfortunately there are some members of staff who cannot see the benefits of having active students within their Schemes. I remember that at the last NFVLS Conference that I attended there was a member of staff present who was totally against any student being there and who couldn't see any reason for it. I was in one of the workshops with him and during this workshop there were a few heated discussions. At the end of the workshop he came out with a surprising statement - that he had seen for the first time the importance of having active students! The staff may be the experts on the theory, but the students are the experts on the practicality of literacy! The conferences are able to bring the two together.

3. I also had opportunities to meet students from other schemes. There is a lot of truth in the old saying - a trouble shared is a trouble halved.

> Like all students I hit problems and barriers and there are many ways to go over these and it is really helpful to discuss our individual hurdles and to discuss literacy in general. It is quite noticeable to what a degree members of staff have influence over students, which can be a positive or a negative thing depending again on the attitude of the members of staff.

Through meeting other students I also first found out about the National Students' Association (NSA), an organisation which is made up of students and ex-students.

Since I have been attending these conferences I have also become more involved in my own Scheme, in a much more practical way. What I have learnt at the conferences I have been able to pass onto volunteers, members of staff and other students at Cambridge House.

I have also become an active member of the NSA and, in fact, I am actually now its national treasurer! Through becoming NSA treasurer I have also become more involved with the NFVLS, as the NSA and the NFVLS work very closely together. I have even attended committee meetings and the AGM of NFVLS. There is no doubt in my opinion that NFVLS have done more to help adult literacy and student participation than any other organisation that I know!

It is also through being involved with NFVLS that I became involved with Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), who fund the NFVLS conferences. Just recently NSA and NFVLS put in a joint application to ALBSU, to fund some conferences to be organised by students and run by students. Because of what I have

learnt at the conferences, I was in a position to be one of the planners to organise, plan and run a workshop on one of these student conferences! None of this would have been possible if I hadn't attended any conferences!

A question which I have often been asked at conferences by members of staff from other Schemes who wish to try and get their own students more involved, is how to achieve this. Speaking from personal experience the initiative and motivation has got to come from the staff. Students, though, who wish to become more involved in their Schemes, but find their efforts blocked by their members of staff, have to become more insistent and can enrol the help of the NSA. Without Rosey and the other members of staff at Cambridge House giving myself and the other students so much help and encouragement and spending so much of their time with us, Cambridge House wouldn't now be such an active Scheme. I will always be grateful to them. I believe that becoming an active student is a skill that has to be learnt, just like working in a group or with a one-to-one. If you ever get an opportunity to attend an NFVLS conference, whether as a volunteer or a student, I can thoroughly recommend it!

Chapter Eight

NSA/NFVLS CONFERENCES

As I became more involved with the NSA, I also became involved with the planning of their conferences. This became my second greatest challenge and undertaking in literacy. Obviously the first one being learning to read and write. It is not until you become involved in planning a conference that you realise how much work is entailed. Although it was a lot of hard work at the time, it was a very great experience for me.

There were two NSA conferences in 1984 - "Sharing our Experience" in July and "A Step Further" in December. Although I wasn't involved with the planning of the first NSA conference, it was at that first conference that I ran my first workshop and discussion group. The workshop was mainly about sharing our experiences in the different ways that schemes operate throughout the country and I learnt a great deal about other schemes and different methods of working.

However, with the second NSA conference, I was one of the planners. There were six of us - Kathy from the Wirral, Terry from Liverpool, Roy from Stockport, Michelle from Halifax, Bernadette from Birmingham and myself from London. In the planning meetings we had to decide the timetable of the conference, times of workshops, small and large group sessions and importantly, what we were each going to be responsible for. Unfortunately during these meetings Bernadette became ill and so she was unable to continue. By the time that it came to the conference the five of us were working as a team. It was the best group that I

have ever sat on, as we all worked well together. We were all nervous, but we overcame it.

We each took responsibility for a different part of the conference. One person had the unenviable task of finding a venue for the conference and then notifying all the schemes. I myself had responsibility for four areas:-

1. As Treasurer, I had to keep an eye on the budget to ensure that we did not overspend.

2. I would be acting in support of all the workshop leaders. There were to be three workshops for everyone to do - fund-raising, publicity and identifying roles - and also four optional workshops - publicity design, making the most of equipment, magazine workshop and student involvement.

3. I was to be responsible for the organising and running of the student involvement workshop.

4. We wanted to organise and try out a colour group system to share the workload at the conference. Each group leader would be responsible for a group of students, helping them with their problems and queries and the students would be identified by coloured badges. We worried about how this idea would be accepted by the students, but we needn't have done so. At the conference students gave us many new suggestions for expanding its use at our next conference in April 1985.

Of the four, I found the most interesting and challenging to be the planning of the student

involvement workshop. During the planning meetings we decided that it would be a good idea to have a member of staff helping us during both the student involvement workshop and the publicity design workshop. We felt that this was very important, as student involvement is a partnership with members of staff. As we are both at the same Scheme, I therefore asked Alison to assist me and so she was the member of staff at the conference.

In the student involvement workshop four main questions were discussed:

1. Is training important?

2. Who needs training?

3. What is training?

4. Who can do training?

The workshop started off with the introductions and then the students split into threes or fours and discussed and filled in a questionnaire that Alison and I had prepared, all the questions of which were simply answered by ticking the approriate answer - "Yes, maybe, or No." Everyone then came back together and discussed their various answers. It was a very lively discussion and every group had something to say.

After the main discussion the students also discussed the following two questions:-

1. What training do students need?

2. Ways that students can contribute to training.

From these discussions we made out two lists, which I have put into my report of the conference, which is at the end of this chapter.

Both Alison and I felt that this workshop went very well and I found it a great help to me to have Alison in support. In fact the whole conference went quite smoothly and I think that it proved, without a doubt, that students can work well together and that events run for students, by students, are very worthwhile, especially as at the conference, for the first few hours, everyone is a stranger to nearly everyone else.

After the conferences the planning group have to do an evaluation and report which have to be sent to both ALBSU and the NFVLS. These reports are extremely important because it is through these reports that we argue our case for more money for further conferences. The planning group made an application for funding for a further conference in April 1985 and this application was successful. We booked a venue for our third weekend conference, called "The Way we Work."

The new planning group for this third conference was made up of three of the original planning group - Kathy, Michelle and myself - and three students who attended the last conference and this planning group also worked very well together.

I know that the planning group and myself will always be grateful for the continuing support, help and guidance that we have received from NFVLS. I have also found that whenever I have had any contact with ALBSU, they have always been extremely helpful and encouraging. I find it very encouraging as a student, to find that so much help is available to students, from such an influential organisation.

Report of NSA/NFVLS "A Step Further" Conference, Ruskin College, Oxford, 14th/16th December 1984.

Optional Workshops

Training

This workshop, which ran for nearly two and a half hours, was one of the four choices of the practical workshops. It was a well attended workshop, with a good cross-section of students from throughout the country. Obviously there was a wide range of experience among all of the students of being involved with training. The workshop began with the usual introductions and also present at this workshop was a member of staff from Cambridge House Literacy Scheme. It was felt by the planning group that it was important to have a member of staff at this workshop as we have always said that training is a partnership

The students broke up into groups of threes and everyone discussed and filled in a questionnaire. This questionnaire was split up into four sections:-

1. Is training important?

2. Who needs training?

3. What is training?

4. Who can do training?

All the questions on the questionnaire were quite simply answered by ticking the appropriate answer from the choice - "yes", "Maybe" or "No." After the various groups had filled in their questionnaires everyone came together again and discussed their

various answers. It was a very lively discussion and every group had something to say.

During this discussion the surprising thing was that the word 'training' had different meaning to different people and that they all had different experiences of literacy. Some students had only worked with 1-to-1's and others had only worked in groups. Everyone felt that training was very important though and that everyone needs training whether they are students, volunteer tutors or members of staff.

After the main discussions we also discussed the following questions:

1. What training do students need?

2. Ways that students can contribute to training.

At the end of the workshop everyone felt that they had learnt something and that they would go back to their various schemes with new ideas. The only disappointment was that we ran out of time. One point that came out of the workshop were all the various ways that students get around their problems. We felt that there was a great need, at a later conference, for a workshop on overcoming difficulties and measuring progress.

CONCLUSIONS

Students need training in:

Whats involved in working in a group and 1-to-1.
How long training takes.
Working harmoniously together.
Training to set up a self-help group.

Awareness of themselves and what they can do.
How to support each other without being patronising.
To become students counsellors.
Students showing students how to learn.
Training as an NSA representative.
Training to share our expertise.
Students learning how to train the trainers.

Ways Students can Contribute to Training:

To pass on experience to others.
Being involved on a training course for new volunteers.
Helping others - students
volunteers
the "experts."
Communication.
Writing for training.
Making tape/slide shows.
Helping with workshops.
Materials, looking at progress.
Talking to volunteers.
Feeding in ideas to groups and 1-to-1s.
Publicity and outreach.
Students encouraging other students.
Organising funding.
Helping someone understand.
Training the trainers.

Schemes should involve students. Having students and others, everyone on the course should be on an equal footing. Literacy is always a partnership.

Chapter Nine

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE

I have just recently been part of the planning team for the last NFVLS conference - "Informal Learning." This was the first time that I had helped to plan and run a conference for the NFVLS. It was a really useful experience to see the way that the NFVLS run their conferences. This conference made me realise how important informal learning has been in my development as a literacy student. Not long after that conference I helped to plan and run the third NSA Conference on "The Way That We Work." This conference, more than any other, made me realise what a potential literacy students have and it made me look at myself in a new way. Not only what I can get out of adult literacy, but also what I can give back to it.

Learning to read and write has often been described as a journey, with stops and starts. It has also been described as a race, where you run around the running track and the hurdles are seen as obstacles which have to be overcome. Sometimes you trip over these hurdles, but pick yourself up again and carry on or you may drop out for a while and carry on again later.

I look at my literacy in a slightly different way. I think of literacy as entering a large maze. When you first enter the maze, the way to the centre seems nearly impossible, with all the blind alleys and dead-ends, but gradually you manage to work your way further into the maze. You may have to go over the same ground two or three times, but with persistence you eventually make it to the centre.

I think that the whole journey, from the outside to the centre, is extremely difficulty and full of many setbacks, which can be the cause of much dropping out. You can never be completely sure whether you can make it to the centre or not. It has taken me over ten years to make this journey. I think that the journey from the outside to the centre was when my literacy was a major problem to me and this was when I had so much difficulty working in groups. Fortunately, I have at last overcome this problem with groups, largely because I now have much more confidence in my abilities. I think that this was when I reached the centre of my maze.

Now that I have reached the centre of the maze and I have started on the journey out, literacy has become only a difficulty, which I will overcome. Now that I am on the homeward journey the time has come for me to decide what I want to do in adult literacy.

I have realised, by helping to plan and run conferences and also by sitting in on training sessions at Cambridge House, how involved I have become with training. I have become more convinced all the time, that I have a lot to offer for training.

Although I have led workshops at conferences, I feel that training is extremely important. All that I have learnt about training so far, has been learnt informally by trial and error and by watching other people and also through my own experiences in literacy. I feel that I would like to get proper training on how to train others. It is no good having a mass of knowledge and not be able to pass it on. Obviously this is an area that I will work round. I think that staff and organisations, like NFVLS, see that you are taking training seriously, a way will be found.

I feel that students, like myself, who are on their way out of the maze, can be a great help to other students who are still struggling to the centre.

They can even be a major asset to the staff of their literacy schemes, who are their guides through the maze. I have managed to make it to the centre only because I have had the right guidance, from staff, volunteers and students, plus the fact of the double asset of being involved with the NFVLS and the NSA.

The fact that I have had the opportunity to attend NFVLS conferences, and through these, become involved with the NSA, the last three NSA conferences have proved to me what literacy students are capable of achieving. The fact that students can plan and run conferences is proof within itself! I think that apart from what I have learnt at my own scheme, working with other students throughout the country at the conferences, has been the area of greatest reward for me and it has certainly extended my outlook on life generally. It has also given me the opportunity to extend myself far more than it would have been possible if I had been working only within my own scheme.

I am very hopeful in the future, now that I have a strong sense of direction to what I would like to achieve. I feel that I have three goals in mind:-

1. To be able to read and write sufficiently well as to be independent of any more help. Because I have had the opportunity to assess and evaluate what I have been doing, mainly due to writing this book, and to see what I have achieved, I know that it is only a question of time before I reach the outside of the maze again and complete

the journey. I am not sure how much longer this will take, but I do have faith in myself now that I will eventually achieve this and I shall not make the mistake again of giving up.

2. To get more involved in all aspects of training. The first thing that I have to do to achieve this is to work out a plan of action which is right for me. One thing that I have learnt is that when you teach other people, you also learn more yourself.

3. I would, in the future, like to write another book. This time on aspects of training, not only being trained, but also training other people, from a student's point-of-view, plus the aspects of conferences and the very important aspect of sharing information and experiences, with people from all over the country.

The one thing that I have learnt is that learning goes in fits and starts and to really persevere.

Chapter Ten

CAMBRIDGE HOUSE NOW

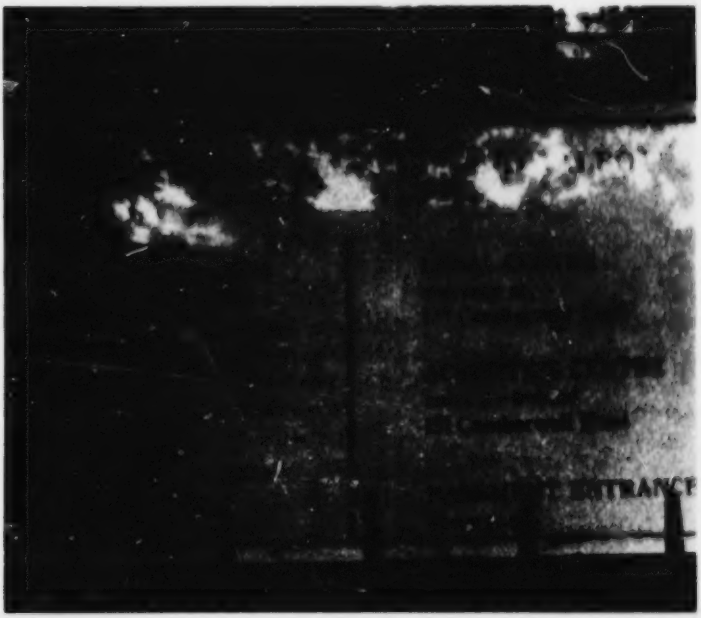
Cambridge House, in South London, consists of many different projects - youth and community work, a project for the mentally handicapped, a legal centre and the literacy scheme are only a few of the bodies all working in the same building.

Cambridge House Literacy Scheme, which is grant-aided by ILEA, began in 1965, with just an office and one part-time member of staff. People came from all over the Greater London area, to become students or volunteers. A student and a volunteer would work together in a 1-to-1. Volunteers were divided into groups and these groups would meet every 2-3 months and contact was maintained between times through a regular newsletter. In general though, this way of working tended to isolate both students and volunteers.

In 1973 the Right to Read Campaign was started by the British Association of Settlements (BASSAC) with literacy workers, including those at Cambridge House. This campaign brought adult literacy to the notice of the public. In 1975 the Government gave £1,000,000 to adult literacy nationally and set up the Adult Literacy Resource Agency, now called ALBSU - Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. At the same time the TV programme "On the Move" again increased public awareness, as well as attracting a lot more students. As a result of national publicity and pressure, literacy classes and projects increased in number. This growth in provision meant that by 1980 Cambridge House had to limit its catchment area to its two local postal

areas, as there were then 500 students using the Scheme.

Since then the number of students have been reduced and there is now approximately 150 regular students and a large number of volunteers and also three full-time and one part-time members of staff. The full-time staff members each supervise one third of the students and volunteers which means that students now have a lot more support. This method works very successfully at Cambridge House.



Noticeboard outside Cambridge House

As you have probably gathered, Rosey is the member of staff that I go to with my problems and for advice and she has been a major influence in encouraging me to get so involved with so many different aspects of literacy - such as conferences and workshops, etc. I must say that all the students receive the same level of support from their member of staff.

In 1984, through funds from the Manpower Services Commission Voluntary Projects Programme, the Scheme was able to set up a basic education project for students coming ten hours a week. The Scheme works closely with the local adult education institutes. Some of the groups are funded by Southwark Institute and Cambridge House is attempting to build further links. The Scheme has also started a daytime and an evening maths group.

With all these activities going on, space is beginning to be a problem. All the Scheme has in the building are two large teaching rooms, one office and the photography darkroom, which also has to double as a creche. Apart from all the classes the Literacy Scheme also organise workshops and 1-to-1 meetings, introduction courses for new tutors, the newsletters and publications, the photography group, fundraising, outings and social events. It is because staff, volunteers and students all work so closely together, that all this is possible. Also the staff of all the various bodies attached to Cambridge House meet together every fortnight.

As you can see Cambridge House runs an active and full life!

Chapter Eleven

BREAKING INTO NEW GROUND

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, it has been a long uphill struggle for me and it is only in the past year that it has really started to pay off at last. Because I have been fortunate enough to find a way through my difficulties, it has now made learning much easier. I found that learning was very difficult and slow to start with, but that it has become easier and my progress more noticeable. This is one of the chief reasons why I think it is difficult to get oneself motivated at this stage. In fact you are like a young sapling who needs a strong pole to support it and doesn't sway in the wind so easily.

Fortunately I have now reached this stage and, like a tree that grows and gets new branches, I have expanded my interests into new areas. I was fortunate in June 1985 to attend the ALBSU Summer School in Bradford. This was the first real opportunity that I had had to meet other people in adult basic education, outside the voluntary sector, although I have had lots of contacts with other students and staff from other voluntary schemes. I personally got a great deal out of the Summer School and I learnt a great deal from it and so I gained more confidence and enthusiasm in myself.

After the Summer School I felt that it was time for me to expand my outlook on literacy. In September 1985, while I stayed with my group, for the first time in years, I looked again at the prospectus at my local institute and I joined an evening group at Morley

College and I also joined the Independent Learning Project there. Because I have, at last, managed to overcome my difficulties of learning in groups, I have managed to settle in quite quickly in the evening group. In fact I have found it quite stimulating working in a different environment once again.

The Independent Learning Project offered me a completely new challenge and was something that I had never managed to do before. In the past I have always worked with other people, whether in groups or with a one-to-one, and I found it impossible to work on my own. Joining Independent Learning was a real challenge to me and, to my surprise, I managed to overcome my anxieties and I discovered that I could work independently. All those years that I had struggled have paid dividends and, knowing now that I do have the ability to work on my own, has had a tremendous affect on the work that I do in my group.

Although I hadn't worked with a one-to-one for about six months, because Wendy had left after being promoted at work, this setback has now turned into something positive. If I had still had a volunteer I might not have tried the Independent Learning. I hope to be getting a new one-to-one and, for a while at least, I will see how working with a one-to-one and with my groups at Cambridge House and Morley College and also doing Independent Learning helps me.

Another area that I have found very encouraging is that the National Students' Association has managed to get a successful grant application through from ALBSU. Obviously, being involved with the NSA, especially now that the NSA is a funded body, will give me an opportunity to put back something into adult basic education, that I received so much from. Because I

have been so fortunate to find my way through the literacy maze, I hope that I will have the opportunity to help and encourage other students who are still having difficulties. Another important skill is learning how to make use of whatever provision is available in one's own area and also where to seek advice and help.

One of my long term objectives is that eventually I could progress enough to become a volunteer tutor at Cambridge House and so complete the circle. I have heard of a number of students becoming volunteers and some even paid workers. To me personally this would be more of a mark of success than the passing of exams. I strongly feel that literacy is a personal skill that each of us has to learn for ourselves.

These are probably the main reasons why I wrote this book. Obviously this book is only about my own personal experiences of learning. Having had the opportunities to meet quite a lot of students, my story is not unique. Many students have achieved as much or even more than myself. What I do hope is that reading about some of my experiences in literacy may give others the encouragement to carry on.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

In October 1985, I joined the Independent Learning Project at Morley College. This was a new experience for me. Although I had worked in groups and with 1-to-1s, the Independent Learning Project (I.L.P.) offered me a totally new way of working.

When I started one of the first things that I learnt was 'autonomy'. Probably you are wondering what the word 'autonomy' means. Basically it means that you have control of your own learning. I must admit that I found this difficult to put into practice. Unfortunately, the Project only had five months to run before its funding ran out. I had, therefore, to meet it head on, to see whether I could adapt to this new way of learning, or as they would say in the Project, become "an autonomous learner." I felt, personally that I got quite a lot out of the Project.

So how did I achieve this? It seemed to me that I went through different stages of development. The first stage was when I was shown the ways of using the various materials available in the Project, the second stage was to set some goals to aim for. Obviously I couldn't aim too far ahead, owing to the short length of the Project. The third stage was to assess and to evaluate for myself, the work that I had been doing in the Project and the fourth stage was actually getting into Independent Learning.

Community Building at Morley College

Stage 1 Materials: *The Project had a large selection of materials. Most of these came out of the resource library, which was part of the Independent Learning. The resource library was split up into different sections - dictionary work, spelling, reading materials, proof reading, punctuation, writing skills, etc. The library was quite well laid out and it was quite easy to find the different sections, but it wasn't always so easy to know what was available in each section. Probably given more time, as I got more*

familiar with the library, I think that the problem would have resolved itself.

Stage 2 Goals: My initial goal was to be able to use the resource library and to choose and use worksheets by myself. Another goal was to use the I.L.P. in conjunction with my group work, to get an overall balance of my learning. Unfortunately the time for the Project ran out, before I could really complete this part.

In Independent Learning, with the first three stages, you work with a tutor, but the fourth stage you work independently, taking responsibility for your own learning and we use a tutor only as an advisor. Obviously, at this stage, a tutor plays an important part in evaluating and assessing the work which you have carried out independently of a tutor. Basically, the stage that I reached, before the project ended, was that I could go to the resource library, choose some materials to work with and then assess what I had done, checking for mistakes. Most of the worksheets had a secondary sheet, which you could use to help you to check the other work that you had done. When I had completed these I would then see the tutor, to go over any points that I hadn't understood and to ask and seek advice on ways of overcoming these difficulties. This might mean the tutor recommending certain other worksheets for me to do or suggesting that

I make up a worksheet of my own, or us just talking about my problem.

You might think that this sounds similar to what you might do in normal group work, but there is a major difference. When I decided for myself what work I wanted to do in the Project - whether a worksheet, a piece of writing, spelling or punctuation - I did this totally by myself. I might do some of the work at home, or do some at the college, when there were no tutors around. It was the first time that I had ever managed to do homework! The amount of work that I did and how long I worked on it, was entirely my decision. The longer that I was in the Project the amount that I was doing was gradually increasing.

The Independent Learning Library

If I wished I could still carry on with Independent Learning on my own. The resource library is still there at Morley College, but as there is no longer a tutor to check my work and as I didn't reach far enough into stage 4, I didn't really have the confidence to do this.

I think that the important point is, whether you are working independently, in a group or with a tutor in a 1-to-1, one factor remains always the same - you only get back out of it what you are prepared to put into it. There is no magic wand!

Published in RAPAL Bulletin, No.2

IN SUMMARY

I feel that I have been very fortunate that in recent years I have seen the improvements in the ways that literacy is now taught and also the great improvement and availability of materials that tutors and students now have to draw upon. As you have seen from this book, I have moved around groups and classes quite a bit over the years. Obviously, this caused me some difficulties, but it had many advantages as well. It gave me the opportunities to learn to work in different ways and situations - 1-to-1, group working and independent learning.

One of the groups, that I am working with at the moment is "team teaching". This is a group where you have two paid tutors and also a volunteer, if you are fortunate enough. Some of the advantages that I have found with this method are:-

1. A more wide-ranging aspect to group discussions, helped also by these groups being larger than the normal groups.

2. There is more scope for individual work, because there are two tutors. Every student can get the benefit of individual help, as with a 1-to-1, without the whole group suffering, as there is another tutor available for the group while one is occupied with another student.

I think that "team teaching" gives a new potential to group work. I have personally found that I have been able to use the skills and I learnt in the Independent Learning Project and group work skills together within team teaching. For the first time I am actually enjoying group work!

I think that one of the most important things that I have learnt is how to make the most of whatever situations you are in. Basically there are three main requirements for good group learning:-

1. The situation that you work in.

2. The materials that you have to work from and what use you make of them.

3. The tutor that you work with, together with the other students and volunteers within the group.

I believe that as a student you can have some influence on each of these factors. As an individual you can make either a very positive or a very negative learning experience for both yourself and the other students. Basically, what I am saying is, that I feel that it is very important for the individual student to take responsibility for their own learning. Tutors are there to help you to achieve your goals, but unfortunately, they cannot do the learning for you!

I would like to take this opportunity now to thank all the many people that have guided me through the literacy maze throughout the years - all the various tutors, volunteers and staff at Cambridge House, especially Rosey, and also all the other students. I would especially like to thank my wife and daughter for all their support and encouragement. It was my wife who first contacted Cambridge House for me in the beginning and, without her gently nagging me, I might have never found out and stuck to classes and so I could still have been in the same sorry position as I was when I left school! I have never acquired her love of books, but at last I can now read newspapers

and magazines, can find my way around and, most importantly, I feel more at ease with people.

I hope that through reading this book you have gained an insight into the life of an ordinary literacy student and that it will be a help and an encouragement both to other students and to tutors.

John Johnson 1986

STAFF VIEW

In reading John's text I am struck by the changes that have taken place, both in John's involvement in literacy and in the wider world of literacy. It is only by standing back that there is a chance to see what has happened. John has done this and has made some comments on what he feels this has meant to him. I find his account very illuminating.

At Cambridge House Literacy Scheme, each student is linked to one of the paid staff. The staff member acts as a personal tutor and advisor. The role varies from person to person. I have been John's staff contact since 1980. Some of the changes of which I have become aware over this time are John's confidence; his approach to coping with problems in the Scheme; and his views on learning. John has gained a lot of confidence during this time. I have noticed his growing readiness to have a go and then review what he has done. Very different to earlier times when he would raise obstacles before starting. He is much more involved in setting his aims and goals and is prepared to break things into manageable chunks and build on them. I think this demonstrates his better understanding of the learning process.

One of the biggest problems that John feels he has to face is the change in one-to-one tutor. When I first had to deal with this situation, John wrote me a note. He told me later that he didn't think I would do anything about it. He was ready to leave the Scheme. We met and talked. The outcome was a new tutor pairing within a few weeks. Recently, a similar situation arose, but the panic John had gone through in the first changeover did not re-appear this time. I am sure some of it is to do with his increased

confidence. John's views on learning are similar to many students. The tutor knows best. However, John has been involved in a wide variety of learning situations and his attitude is changing. He has a growing realisation that self-assessment is a very important aspect of learning. He sees that the student has to be active in this process.

Rosey Eggar
Cambridge House Literacy Scheme
1986

Addington Square entrance to Cambridge House

What is a Reading Evening?

It is an opportunity to meet other people in the Scheme and especially other students and I feel they play a vital part in the life of the Scheme.

I've attended quite a few of these evenings and have always been impressed by the variety of writings and topics covered. I think that people come away far more confident in what they can achieve for themselves.

I remember when I attended my first reading evening. I felt quite nervous reading my piece out but after I had done it I felt I had really achieved something worthwhile, to actually write something down and read it out and have people listen to it.

I have found that people are very understanding and not at all critical and also very supportive without being patronising. I think another important factor of a reading evening is not the amount of reading you do, it is the amount of work that has gone into it. Even someone reading a few lines can be a big achievement for somebody. Even if you can't read it yourself but get someone else to read it for you I always appreciate the value of it and I'm sure other people do too.

Obviously it's a totally different experience from reading to your tutor or in your group and I know that these evenings have encouraged students and given them confidence to have a go next time. I think too that meeting others helps to take away any feelings of isolation a student may have, and gives a sense of belonging.

I am really pleased now that I was talked into coming to my first reading evening, and I hope you all get as much out of it as I do.

John Johnson 18/6/85

ADDRESSES

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY LITERACY SCHEMES
131 Camberwell Road
London SE5 0HF

01-703 8083

ADULT LITERACY and BASIC SKILLS UNIT
Kingsbourne House
229-231 High Holborn
London WC1V 7DA
01-405 4017

NATIONAL STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
46 Hamilton Square
Birkenhead
Merseyside
Liverpool L41 5BD

051-647 8456

Adult literacy work has developed dramatically since 1974. Until now there has been little written about these developments.

This book is a personal history of adult literacy through the eyes of a student; a valuable contribution to the field. The writer assesses and evaluates styles of teaching and the student's role through the years 1969-1986. He has been active in developing a new approach to literacy work, as a partnership, working as equals using each other's expertise. The writer aims to encourage other students and tutors to discuss, from their own point of view, the different approaches to literacy work.

This publication will be of interest to all those involved in adult literacy work - students, volunteers and paid staff.

This is the first book of its kind as far as we know and is urgently needed to encourage further developments in the field.

Cambridge House
Literacy Scheme
131 Camberwell Road
London SE5 0HF

ISBN 0 9508988 4 8

Price: £1.50

Copyright: Cambridge House Literacy Scheme